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JUN. '96 1

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JP LEON
HOLDREDGE '96

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1859

AT AN ISOLATED ESTATE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF LONDON...

...WHERE KNOWLEDGE IS PURSUED AT ANY COST...

...A DARK DESTINY THAT WILL CULMINATE TWO THOUSAND YEARS HENCE BEGINS WITH THE PLAINTIVE CRY OF A MOTHER.

WHEN HER SON DIED SUDDENLY, AGED FOUR...

...THEY BURIED HIM HERE, WITH HIS ANCESTORS.

BUT AS THEY LOWERED HIS TINY COFFIN...

...SHE'D FELT AS THOUGH THE FUTURE ITSELF WERE BEING ENTOMBED IN THE RICH KENTISH SOIL...

...OF MILBURY HOUSE.

BUT NOW, TWO YEARS LATER, AS HER SPADE UNCOVERS THAT SAME COFFIN...

...SHE FEELS NOTHING BUT SHEER...

...GODFORSAKEN...

...DREAD.

Stan Lee Presents: The FURTHER Adventures of CYCLOPS AND PHOENIX

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THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CYCLOPS™ AND PHOENIX™ Vol. 1, No. 1, June, 1995. Published by MARVEL COMICS. Gerard Calabrese, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. Copyright © 1995 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved. Price $1.95 per copy in the U.S. and $2.75 in Canada. GST #R127032852. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. CYCLOPS and PHOENIX (including all prominent characters featured in this issue and the distinctive likenesses thereof) are trademarks of MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC. No part of this book may be printed or reproduced in any manner without the written permission of the publisher. Printed in Canada.

SHE WANTS TO STOP.

WANTS THIS NIGHT TO BE OVER.

HER LIFE TO BE NORMAL.

HER HUSBAND TO BE...

HER HUSBAND...

HOW PALE HE WAS ON THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL. AS WHITE AS A BRIDAL GOWN...

... BUT NO TEARS. JUST THOSE EMPTY EYES THAT SPOKE OF SUCH TORMENT.

THE PAIN HITS HER HARD —

— AS THOUGH THEIR BABY WERE TEARING AT HER VERY INSIDES.

SHE SHOULD STOP, SHE THINKS. THIS IS MADNESS.

BUT SHE MUST GO ON.

IF SHE IS EVER TO SLEEP AGAIN...

... IF SHE IS EVER TO BE SANE AGAIN...

KRAKOA

...SHE MUST KNOW WHAT DEMON HAS POSSESSED HER HUSBAND.

ONE MONTH EARLIER...

Oh, LOOK! SOME KIND OF *BONE!*

NATHANIEL, DO LOOK. IT MUST BE TERRIBLY OLD.

Hmmm...

NATHANIEL, MUST YOU WORK EVERY *SINGLE* HOUR GOD GIVES YOU?

NATHANIEL!

HE IS NATHANIEL ESSEX, REGARDED BY SOME TO BE THE GREATEST SCIENTIFIC MIND OF HIS GENERATION...

...AND BY OTHERS AS A DANGEROUS MAN TWISTED BY OBSESSION.

HOW SHE SOMETIMES WISHES HE COULD BE JUST A MAN.

HOW SHE WISHES HE WOULD LET HER INTO HIS WORLD OCCASIONALLY.

YOU SHOULDN'T BE *EXERTING* YOURSELF, *REBECCA.* YOU SHOULD BE RESTING.

THIS BOOK -- "*THE ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES,*" WHY DO YOU *READ* SUCH A THING?

BECAUSE, DEAR REBECCA, *DARWIN* IS A *BRILLIANT* RESEARCHER.

THAT "*THING,*" AS YOU CALL IT, REPRESENTS A GREAT SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENT...

I AM WITH CHILD, SIR, NOT AN *INVALID.*

...THOUGH IT SHOULD BE *GREATER.* DARWIN IS STILL SHACKLED BY TOO MANY... *MORAL CONSTRAINTS.*

BUT... THEY ARE *NECESSARY* IF WE ARE TO MAINTAIN A CIVILIZED WAY OF LIFE.

SCIENCE IS *BEYOND* MORALITY! AND I DO NOT NEED A... A *WOMAN* TO TELL ME OTHERWISE!

YOU -- YOU'RE *BLEEDING*, NATHANIEL!

SO I AM. BUT I MUST GO. I MUST GIVE A LECTURE TO THOSE *FOOLS* AT THE *ROYAL SOCIETY*... IF I'M TO PREVENT MY *EXPULSION!*

BUT... NATHANIEL..?

WHAT NOW, REBECCA?

YOU DIDN'T TELL ME... ABOUT THE BONE.

MERELY A *FOSSIL* OF AN *AMMONIT*,. A KIND OF *SEA* MOLLUSK THAT DIED SEVERAL MILLION YEARS AGO.

FORGIVE ME, HUSBAND, BUT SURELY *THAT* IS IMPOSSIBLE.

FATHER TOLD ME THAT *USSHER* WORKED OUT FROM THE BIBLE ITSELF THAT THE WORLD STARTED ONLY *FOUR THOUSAND* YEARS BEFORE *CHRIST*.

THE BIBLE IS *WRONG*.

THERE *IS* NO *GOD*.

THOUGH, IF MY THEORIES ARE CORRECT, SOME HUMANS MIGHT -- IN *TIME* -- *EVOLVE* INTO GODS!

SOON... A MEETING OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY, LONDON.

WITH RESPECT, Mr. DARWIN IS ONLY *PARTLY* CORRECT. EVOLUTION DOES INDEED PROGRESS THROUGH SLOW *INCREMENTAL CHANGES*...

...BUT IT ALSO HAS THE CAPACITY TO UNDERGO RAPID AND *STARTLING TRANSFORMATIONS* WITHIN THE SPACE OF *ONE OR TWO GENERATIONS!*

MOREOVER, I SUGGEST WE HUMANS CONTAIN PARCELS OF HEREDITARY INFORMATION.

THESE PARCELS, WHICH I HUMBLY SUGGEST WE CALL *ESSEX FACTORS*, CARRY THE TRIBULATIONS OF THE *PAST*...

...AND THE POTENTIALITIES OF THE *FUTURE!*

WHEN COMBINED IN THE OFFSPRING OF CERTAIN RACIALLY SUPERIOR INDIVIDUALS —

— THESE PARCELS WILL, WITHIN A HUNDRED YEARS OR SO, *MUTATE.*

GENTLEMEN, WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF AN *EVOLUTIONARY BREAK-THROUGH!*

GOOD HEAVENS!

SNIPP

WHAT... IN THE NAME OF... GOD...

THIS IS BUT A CRUDE PROTOTYPE I HAVE ASSEMBLED TO ILLUSTRATE SOME POSSIBLE ***BIOLOGICAL EXTRAPOLATIONS.***

I HAVE WORKED ON HUMAN PARTS AND FUSED THESE WITH ANATOMICAL REGIONS OF ANIMALS AND OTHER INORGANIC MATERIALS.

IMAGINE THE ***IMPROVEMENTS*** ON OUR ***PRESENT*** HUMAN FORM THAT ARE POSSIBLE! I BEGAN WITH THE ***LUNGS...***

OUTRAGEOUS!

AN ABOMINATION!

THROW THE MADMAN ***OUT!***

BUT... SURELY SCIENCE MUST BE ABOVE SUCH PETTY, CONVENTIONAL MODES OF DECENCY! THIS IS THE ***FUTURE!***

BHOFF

COWARDS!

IF OUR ***FOREFATHERS*** HAD BEEN AS TIMID AS YOU, WE'D STILL BE SITTING IN TREES, EATING BERRIES AND SCRATCHING EACH OTHERS' ***BUTTOCKS!***

DARWIN, SURELY ***YOU*** MUST SEE THE ***SIGNIFICANCE*** OF MY WORK!

Mr. ESSEX — NATHANIEL — FORGIVE ME, BUT I BELIEVE YOU SHOULD CONSULT A *PHYSICIAN.*

I, TOO, HAVE LOST A BELOVED SON, AND KNOW HOW IT CAN AFFECT THE *MIND.*

BUT YOU CANNOT BRING YOUR SON BACK. YOU CANNOT CHANGE THE *PAST* BY ATTEMPTING TO MANIPULATE THE *FUTURE.*

YOUR WORK IS IN MANY WAYS BREATH-TAKING —

— BUT YOU GO *TOO FAR.*

NO! I MUST GO *FURTHER!*

I WOULD, IF I COULD ONLY FREE MYSELF FROM THIS BLASTED SO-CALLED *CONSCIENCE* THAT STILL *POLLUTES* ME.

BUT IF YOU DID... YOU WOULD BE A *MONSTER,* SIR.

A *MONSTER,* LIKE YOUR CREATION!

IF *THAT* IS WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR SCIENCE TO PROGRESS...

... THEN *LET* ME BE A MONSTER!

LET ME BE A **MONSTER!**

IT ONLY TAKES THREE PINTS OF PORTER BEFORE HE FORGETS THE STENCH THAT PERMEATES THE PUB.

BUT THOUGH DRUNK, HE STILL SURVEYS THE WRETCHED CROWD WITH A SCIENTIST'S CLARITY.

AND HE IMAGINES A FUTURE WHERE MANKIND WILL NOT BE PREY TO CRUEL VAGARIES OF EVOLUTIONARY FATE.

A TIME WHEN THE SPECIES WILL DIVERGE, THE ONES WITH THE CORRECT ESSEX FACTOR LEAVING THIS RABBLE IN THE EVOLUTIONARY GUTTER.

FANCY A GOOD TIME, GUV? I'LL WIPE THAT FROWN OFF YER CHINA.

GET AWAY FROM ME, YOU NOISOME HARLOT! I'M A *MARRIED MAN!*

'SCUSE ME, SIR. THE NAME'S *TREMBLE, COOTIE* TREMBLE.

RECKON I'VE GOT SOMEFING MORE SUITABLE FOR A GENTLEMAN LIKE YOURSELF. A KIND OF CIRCUS...

A *SPECIAL* KIND... WHERE YOU'LL SEE CREATURES BEYOND YOUR IMAGINATION.

I *DOUBT* THAT. BUT YOU INTRIGUE ME. WHERE *IS* THIS PLACE?

WHERE ALL THE BESTEST FINGS ARE FOUND, SIR...

"... UNDERGROUND!"

MY GOD! WHAT... ARE THEY?

FREAKS AND FOOLS AND ALL TYPES OF MISSHAPEN FOLK, SIR.

I COLLECT 'EM. AND I'M DOING A CIVIC DUTY. THIS IS THE CAPITAL OF THE EMPIRE ON WHICH THE SUN'LL NEVER, YOU KNOW, *SET*, SIR.

CAN'T 'AVE THESE UGLY BLEEDERS MAKING THE PLACE LOOK UNTIDY.

THIS CHILD LOOKS QUITE... NORMAL.

THAT'S DANNY. HE'S ALL FUNNY IN THE HEAD, SIR.

FUNNY?

'E SAW 'IS PARENTS KILLED BY CUTTHROATS. AIN'T SPOKE A SINGLE WORD *SINCE.*

THAT'S *FUNNY*, AIN'T IT?

Heh

Heh

THE MONSTROUS HAND THAT REACHES OUT FOR HIM IS ODDLY GENTLE.

COULD IT BE, HE WONDERS...

THESE POOR SOULS ARE NOT MERELY FREAKS...

...BUT NATURE'S FAILED EXPERIMENTS?

THE CASTOFFS OF EVOLUTION'S MARCH TOWARD THE GREAT MUTATION?

IT MUST BE THE ALCOHOL, HE MUSES, FOR HE ALLOWS HIMSELF TO DWELL ON ADAM, HIS SON...

HIS FINE, BRAVE ADAM...

WHY WAS HE -- HIS OWN SON -- BORN AS HE WAS?

HIS AILMENTS, CROOKED BONES AND WOEFUL LACK OF BLOOD...

...WERE THEY, TOO, PART OF NATURE'S DRIVE TOWARD THE FUTURE...

...OR SIMPLY CRUEL AND POINTLESS?

AAGH! GET IT OFF! GET IT OFF ME!

BY GOD, THAT... THING ALMOST RIPPED MY *ARM* OFF!

THAT'S MARTHA, SIR. MAYBE SHE JUST WANTED *YOUR* HAND... IN MARRIAGE!

I'VE SEEN *ENOUGH* HERE. SHOW ME THE WAY *OUT*.

BUT WE'VE ONLY JUST GOT ACQUAINTED.

THESE IS ME *MATES*.

WE CALL OURSELVES THE MARAUDERS!

'OLD 'IM!

HOW *DARE* YOU!

DON'T BLAME *US*, SIR. IT'S OUR 'ORRIBLE *UPBRINGING* MAKES US DO IT!

THERE'S 'ARDLY A DROP OF BLOOD IN YOU, SIR.

YOU SHOULD GET *OUT* MORE OFTEN! Heh! Heh!

YOU WANT *THIS?* YOU WANT MONEY? TAKE IT, TAKE IT *ALL*.

BUT IF YOU'RE AS CLEVER AS YOU LIKE TO *THINK* YOU ARE...

TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO *IMPROVE* YOURSELF.

JOIN *MY* CAUSE!

CAUSE?

WHAT SORT OF *CAUSE?*

WHY, THE MOST *SACRED* OF CAUSES.

THE CRUSE OF... *SCIENCE*.

TWO WEEKS LATER...

CEMETERY [illegible] SILENT...

...SAVE FOR THE RUSTLING [illegible] HER SKIRTS, [illegible] SINGING OF [illegible]

ESSEX

[illegible] SOUN[illegible] HER SORROW.

...OH, ADAM, HE SEEMS MORE GAUNT... AND MORE DISTANT BY THE DAY.

I MUST TELL YOU, I *FEAR* FOR OUR FUTURE...

...WHEN YOUR NEW BROTHER OR SISTER IS BORN.

WHY, WHAT *IS* THAT *COMMOTION?*

CAUTIOUSLY, SHE MAKES HER WAY TO THE OLDER PART OF THE CEMETERY...

...WHERE TIME HAS WORN THE NAMES FROM THE CRUMBLING STONES.

WHO ARE THOSE HORRIBLE PEOPLE?

WHAT ARE THEY DOING OUTSIDE *NATHANIEL'S ANNEX?*

FROM THOSE CRATES...

AN ALMOST HUMAN CRY?

WHAT?!

NATHANIEL! YOU STARTLED ME!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING CLAMBERING THROUGH THESE BUSHES?

YOU MUST TAKE BETTER *CARE* OF YOURSELF...

...*AND* OUR BABY.

I... SAW THOSE PEOPLE --

THEY'RE DELIVERING EQUIPMENT... FOR A NEW SERIES OF *EXPERIMENTS.*

AH, YOU'VE BEEN PICKING FLOWERS. MUCH MORE SUITABLE FOR A GENTLEWOMAN.

THEY'RE... FOR *ADAM.*

I LIKE TO TALK TO HIM.

TALK TO HIM?

AT HIS *GRAVESIDE.* ■ THAT SO STRANGE?

I HAVE SO FEW PEOPLE TO TALK TO...

...THE MAIDS ARE TOO BUSY, AND YOU...

OF *COURSE,* DARLING, I UNDERSTAND. IT MUST ■ VERY TIRESOME FOR YOU.

NOW I REALLY MUST GET BACK TO *WORK.*

TELL THE KITCHEN I SHALL NOT ■ REQUIRING SUPPER.

MEANWHILE...

...WORK CONTINUES ON THE SEWERS OF LONDON...

C'MON, FRANKY BOY, PUT YER BACK INTO IT!

LOOK 'ERE, PAT. BLEEDIN' CRACK IN THE GROUND...

AIEEE!

UNBEKNOWNST TO THOSE WHO LIVE IN THE WORLD ABOVE...

...BELOW THE STREETS OF LONDON IS A CAVERNOUS CHAMBER WHICH HAS EXISTED FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS.

NOW, ALIEN TECHNOLOGY VIBRATES SOFTLY, SHAKING OFF CENTURIES OF DUSTY SLEEP LIKE A BEAST WAKING FROM ITS LONG SLUMBER...

...WAKING TO FULFILL AN AWFUL DESTINY.

WHA... WHAT *IS* IT, PAT?

IT IS THE PLACE OF YOUR *FINAL RECKONING*...

WH-WHAT? WH-WHO ARE *YOU*?!

I AM ONE WHOM NATURE HAS PLACED *ABOVE* ALL OTHERS...

...WHO HAS BEEN *TESTED* BY THE STRENGTH OF MEN AND THE RAVAGES OF *TIME*...

...AND HAS PROVEN *FIT* TO *SURVIVE*.

ZAKKER

HAD THEY BEEN STRONG, THEY WOULD HAVE *ATTACKED* ME IN THAT FIRST MOMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS...

...WHEN, DISOREINTED BY LONG YEARS OF *HIBERNATION*, I AM AT MY MOST *VULNERABLE*.

BUT THEY WERE WEAK — AND SO WERE *OBLITERATED*.

AS ALL MUST PERISH WHO STAND ■ MY WAY...

FOR

APOCALYPSE IS RISEN!!

SOON...

HE HAS SEEN MIGHTY PYRAMIDS RISE FROM THE DESERT.

SEEN EMPIRES CRUMBLE TO DUST...

...THE MADNESS OF KINGS AND THE BUTCHERY OF GENERALS...

...BUT NEVER ANYTHING LIKE THIS.

THE RADIANCE THAT HANGS OVER THE CITY LIKE A SMOKY NIMBUS -- IT IS A SIGN...

...A LUMINOUS PORTENT THAT THE GLORIOUS HOUR OF HIS ULTIMATE SUPREMACY OVER MANKIND IS AT HAND.

FOR AS SURE AS THE GASEOUS EXPLOSIONS OF LIGHT CHASE THE SHADOWS FROM THE WINDING STREETS OF THIS STRANGE CITADEL CALLED LONDON...

SO, IN THIS TIME, IN THIS PLACE, WILL HE AT LAST THROW LIGHT ONTO HIS OWN TRUE NATURE...

...AND HIS OWN TRUE DESTINY!

AS THE FALSE DAYLIGHT WASHES OVER HIM...

HE REMEMBERS OTHER LIGHTS...

OTHER TIMES...

ANCIENT EGYPT...

A YOUNG SLAVE CALLED EN SABAH NUR HELPS HEAVE AN ALABASTER STATUE OF THE DARK GOD, SETH...

ALL HIS LIFE HE HAS HARBORED DREAMS THAT BELIE HIS MISERABLE POSITION -- A BELIEF IN HIS OWN INNATE SUPERIORITY.

NO BEATING HAS EVER BROKEN THIS SLAVE, NOR INJUSTICE SHAKEN HIS FIERCE WILL TO SURVIVE.

THE SLAVE DRIVER'S WHIP IS HOT AND HUNGRY.

YET EVEN AS THE PAIN RAGES ACROSS HIS BACK...

...A STRANGE GLOW BURSTS FROM HIS TORTURED FEATURES...

...AN UNSPEAKABLE POWER EXPLODES FROM WITHIN...

...UNTIL SETH HIMSELF SEEMS TO ADDRESS HIM!

EN SABAH NUR! IT IS TIME TO SEIZE YOUR BIRTHRIGHT!

YOU WERE NOT BORN TO BE A SLAVE TO OTHER MEN -- BUT A CONQUEROR!

THOUGH UNSURE OF THE SOURCE OF HIS POWER, EN SABAH NUR FEELS IT ROARING FROM HIS VERY SOUL.

...FALL TO THEIR KNEES...

...AT FIRST MANIFESTATION

FULLNESS

RULE UNDER NAME

-APOCALYPSE!

Oh MY Oh MY! WHAT AN UGLY BRUTE!

OI, COOTIE, COP A LOAD O' THIS FREAK OF NATURE!

ESSEX'LL PAY A PRETTY PENNY FOR *THIS* ONE.

APOCALYPSE LIFTS A HAND...

...AND ONE OF THE MARAUDERS IS INSTANTLY TRANSFIXED.

SO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELVES *PREDATORS*, WILLING TO TRAMPLE OVER THE BODIES OF *OTHERS* IN ORDER TO *SURVIVE.*

THERE IS *STRENGTH* IN THAT.

BUT KNOW *THIS...*

Oh... MY... GOD!

THAT AIN'T...

THAT AIN'T POSSIBLE!

I AM NOT AS *OTHER* MEN -- I AM FAR *MORE* THAN THAT!

KRAK

KILLED BILLY WITH HIS BARE HANDS!

HENCEFORTH, IF YOU ARE TO LIVE...

...IF YOU ARE TO WEATHER THE COMING STORM...

...YOU MUST SERVE *ME.*

BLOODY BRUTE! THAT WAS ME *MATE!*

LET'S SEE HOW YOU LIKE A BIT OF *BRITISH LEAD* UP YOU!

NO WEAPON DEVISED BY MAN --

-- BE IT OF THE PAST TEN CENTURIES OR THE NEXT --

-- CAN HARM *ME.*

I OF ALL PEOPLE KNOW THE BENEFIT OF OWNING *SLAVES.*

SLAVES? *NEVER!* WE'RE BRITISH! BRITAIN NEVER, NEVER SHALL BE...

SILENCE! THIS *ESSEX* YOU SPEAK OF — WHY WOULD HE BE INTERESTED IN *ME?*

TELL 'IM, COOTIE. 'E AIN'T *HUMAN* --

-- 'E AIN'T EVEN *FRENCH!*

N-NO FEAR. COOTIE TREMBLE TA-TAKES ORDERS FROM N-NO ONE!

PERHAPS ANOTHER LESSON IN OBEDIENCE IS REQUIRED.

CO-CO-COOTIE TREMBLE...

...A-AT YOUR SERVICE...

...OH MASTER...

SIR.

MEANWHILE...

...THE GOTHIC VAULTS OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY ECHO WITH THE GENTLE REFRAIN OF EVENSONG...

...AS RICH AND POOR ALIKE BOW BEFORE THEIR GOD.

BUT TONIGHT, THE AIR IS EVEN MORE HIGHLY CHARGED THAN USUAL... WITH AN INEFFABLE SENSE...

...OF THE MIRACULOUS!

GOOD GRACIOUS! THE CANDLES!

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

CALM YOURSELVES! SURELY 'TIS ONLY THE WIND.../

BE CALM *YOURSELF*, SIR — FOR WHAT WIND IS THERE *INSIDE* A CHURCH?

NO ORDINARY WIND.

NO ORDINARY POWER.

THE NICHE GAINES WITH AN UNEARTHLY BRILLIENCE.

AND THE RADIANT LADY SEEMS TO HOVER FOR AN AGE...

...BEFORE FALLING TO EARTH.

A MIRACLE!

AN ANGEL!

JEAN GREY IS ONLY DIMLY AWARE OF THE WORSHIPPERS WHO STARE AT HER IN DEVOTION.

WHAT THE X-MAN CODENAMED PHOENIX DOES REGISTER ARE HER TIME-LOST SURROUNDINGS...

SHE IS QUITE *ALONE!*

COVER YOURSELF, CHILD...

Huh... WHERE—?!

SCOTT?

FROM THE HIGH CHURCH OF KINGS AND QUEENS...

...TO THE LOW SEWER OF RATS AND SQUALOR...

...THE BRILLIANCE OF THE LIGHT IS UNDIMINISHED.

...AS ANOTHER FIGURE SEEMS TO HOVER...

...AND FALL.

BUT FOR SCOTT SUMMERS -- ALSO CALLED CYCLOPS -- THIS IS NO MIRACLE -- BUT A NIGHTMARE!

TORN FROM HIS OWN TIME WITHOUT WARNING --

-- A STENCH FILLS HIS NOSTRILS, HIS HEAD REELS WITH PAIN AND CONFUSION...

MY EYES...!

...THEY'RE NOT PROTECTED BY MY *RUBY QUARTZ* VISOR!

...THERE'S NOTHING TO CONTROL MY *OPTIC BLASTS!*

FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES --

-- I'M *BLIND!*

BUT THE HUMAN BODY WAS NOT MEANT FOR SUCH ORDEALS. HE FALLS UNCONSCIOUS INTO A FOUL LAKE OF FILTH...

...AND DOES NOT SEE THE TWISTED AND DESOLATE CREATURES EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS...

MILBURY HOUSE...

IT IS NOT THE HOWLING WIND...

...THE POUNDING RAIN...

...NOR EVEN THE KICKING OF HER UNBORN CHILD...

...THAT STOPS REBECCA ESSEX FROM SLEEPING.

NATHANIEL...

...I HAVE NEVER WILLINGLY DISOBEYED YOU.

I TAKE MY VOWS SERIOUSLY.

I HAVE LOVED *AND* OBEYED.

BUT I AM ONLY HUMAN... AND I HAVE OUR *CHILD* TO THINK OF.

IT CANNOT BE... HEALTHY FOR THE UNBORN BABE TO HAVE ITS MOTHER ASSAILED BY SUCH... *HELLISH* IMAGININGS.

FOR I CANNOT HELP BUT DWELL... UPON THE EXACT NATURE OF... YOUR *EXPERIMENTS.*

I HEAR THEM SCREAM, NATHANIEL. THEIR SOFT, PITIFUL *SCREAMS.*

OR IS IT I? IS IT *I* WHO AM GOING... MAD?

THERE IT IS. YOUR *ANNEX,* YOUR SACRED PLACE OF WORK...

...THE *ANVIL* UPON WHICH YOU HAVE TRIED TO HAMMER THE *GRIEF...* AND PERHAPS THE *HUMANITY...* FROM YOUR SOUL.

YOU TOLD ME I MUST NEVER, EVER ENTER THAT PLACE...

...AND I HAVE NEVER WILLINGLY DISOBEYED YOU, NATHANIEL —

— UNTIL *TONIGHT.*

1

As she enters the annex she tries to give herself courage.

She's just being silly, she tells herself.

It's her condition making her overly sensitive.

Surely she will discover that Nathaniel's work is completely innocent and worthwhile.

He is a great man, and the works of great men are often misunderstood.

This is wrong. She should turn back!

But some inexorable force drives her on.

It is a deep, nameless fear.

An evil worm that has gnawed at her -- quietly -- patiently -- for two years...

NO!

She should STOP!

Do not pull the sheet away!

Stay ignorant!

But it is too late.

She sees it.

And her blood turns to ice.

AND SO REBECCA ESSEX RUNS FROM THE ANCIENT HOUSE OF HER HUSBAND'S FAMILY —

— ACROSS THE CEMETERY, WHERE THE OLD DEAD BODIES IN THEIR OLD ROUGH GRAVES SEEM TO CLAW AND PULL AT HER.

IT CANNOT BE, SHE THINKS.

NATHANIEL COULD NOT DO THIS!

BUT THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY SHE WILL KNOW.

THE WOOD OF HER SON'S COFFIN IS SOFT AND MOLDY.

THE LID OPENS LIKE THE MOUTH OF A NEW-BORN BABE ABOUT TO TAKE ITS FIRST CRY.

BUT THERE IS NO CRY...

...AND THERE IS NO BABE.

DEAR GOD — NO!

NATHANIEL ESSEX HAS SEEN HER.

FOR A MOMENT HIS UNBLINKING DRIVE FOR SCIENTIFIC BRILLIANCE FALTERS...

REBECCA WAIT! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!

...AND PERHAPS HE SEES THE TRUE HORROR OF WHERE HIS OBSESSION HAS LED HIM.

OUR... OWN SON? HOW COULD YOU! HOW COULD YOU?

BUT HE WAS ALREADY... ALREADY TAKEN FROM US. I THOUGHT... HIS DEATH WOULD NOT BE IN VAIN...

...IF I COULD PREVENT OTHERS FROM DYING LIKE HIM.

PERHAPS, SIR, WE SHOULD TAKE YOUR WIFE INSIDE.

WH- WHO..?!

MY NAME IS... EN SABAH NUR.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, I AM SOMEONE VERY... INTERESTED IN YOUR WORK.

SOMEONE WHO MAY YET...

...BE AN INVALUABLE ALLY.

NEXT

Unnatural Selection